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UNCLAS HARARE 000627

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/S  
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JFRAZER

¶E. O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: ECON EAGR PGOV ZI  
SUBJECT: DIVERGENT COMMERCIAL FARMER GROUPS ATTEMPT TO FIND COMMON GROUND

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¶1. (SBU) Laboff attended a meeting called by the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) intended to address the needs of displaced farmers; the meeting actually ended up addressing divisions between its supporters and supporters of the hard-line farmers' group Justice for Agriculture (JAG). Although the two groups represent the same constituency, a split occurred last July when the CFU elected to continue seeking dialogue with the GOZ, while JAG elected to pursue court challenges and international publication of corruption and irregularities associated with the land resettlement program. Subsequent conversations with CFU president Colin Cloete revealed that the "split" was actually a carefully conceived strategy which would enable divergent factions to pursue separate agendas on behalf of the group as a whole. However, since most supporters of CFU are still attempting to remain on their farms while most supporters of JAG are completely dispossessed, the two-track approach dissolved and the two groups have reverted to factionalism, acrimony, and name-calling.

¶2. (SBU) Both factions, with a few individual exceptions, agreed that the best way to confront the continuing seizure of farms and resulting chaos on the ground was to present a united front. Cloete reported that Masipula Sithole, a prominent political analyst, opines that the GOZ has no coherent plan for the future of agriculture, but rather is progressing on a "crisis management" basis. Cloete affirmed that his organization was attempting to craft a suitable response to the demand that it sign a one-sided and heavily GOZ-weighted Memorandum of Understanding. Although still being drafted, this response reportedly will be presented to the GOZ when "the time is right," presumably within the next few weeks. Cloete also raised publicly the possibility that many farmers' only relief might lie in compensation, and that full and fair compensation might not materialize until the next generation.

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Comment  
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¶3. (SBU) It would obviously best serve the two publicly warring factions to present a united front to the GOZ, and many participants at this meeting indicated the groups' agreement with that strategy. Although the chances for all commercial farmers to return to their properties are practically nonexistent, there are moderate factions within the GOZ that have admitted that returning some farmers to productive endeavors is critical for the country's food security. Whether those forces can prevail is uncertain, but infighting and backbiting between farmers only serves to make them easier targets for the hardline forces. The CFU seems eager for support and recognition by the USG, and Cloete twice asked Laboff to comment on the current situation -- in relation to eventual compensation for dispossessed farmers, and in relation to food aid for dispossessed farm workers. Although Laboff could offer little in the way of solution, she did point out that few, if any, bilateral donors would consider discussing with the GOZ assistance for land reform under the current political climate, and that international food aid donors are aware of the desperation of displaced farm workers and attempting to address their critical needs. Although commercial farmers seem determined to try and retain something from their ruined legacy, the awareness is dawning that help will not arrive from the outside, but that they must somehow find the means to help themselves -- and each other.

Whitehead